

Preparing for interviews, auditions and folios

Lots of courses have requirements for selection like presenting a folio, doing an audition or attending an interview. Getting ready to present your work can be nerve-racking, so here are some tips.

While many courses select applicants based on their previous academic achievement (e.g. ATAR or tertiary grades), a large number of courses want to assess applicants' other attributes.

Folio presentations and auditions are common for courses in the creative arts, like acting, dance, music and design.

Interviews are often part of the application process for courses in the health sector, such as medicine, natural therapies, and social work—areas where you'll be working with people day to day.

Some TAFE institutes and smaller colleges require all applicants to attend an interview, regardless of what they're applying for.

To find out whether you need to do an interview, folio, audition or anything else as part of your course application, read the 'essential requirements and admission criteria' in the course entry. VTAC doesn't administer interviews, auditions or folio presentations—you will need to arrange these with the institutions directly.

The following tips for how to make the best possible impression have been provided by staff from institutions who regularly audition, interview and/or evaluate the folios of applicants.

Read the brief

The first and most important thing is to make sure you understand what is required. If an audition calls for a five minute monologue, don't prepare a fifteen minute dance piece. If you're asked to include ten drawings in a folio, don't bring six sculptures instead. Make sure you read the brief thoroughly and continually refer back to it. You have been given instructions for a reason, so don't make the experience harder for yourself by ignoring what you have been asked for.

Do your homework

Research the institution and course beforehand so you can talk confidently about why you want to study there. Showing that you know about the course structure and expectations will demonstrate your interest. It's also perfectly fine to ask the institution for advice on preparing—they can tell you what to expect on the day and anything in particular they will be looking for. And if you have any friends who have already been through the process, make sure to ask them for tips!

Plan ahead

You might not know every question that will be asked, but you can guess some of the obvious ones. Likely suspects include "why do you want to study here?" and "why are you applying for this course?". Practise answering questions like these so that on the day you can answer with ease. Think about what makes the course or institution unique so you can tailor your answers. If you had to submit a VTAC Personal Statement or a written submission as part of your

application, be prepared for questions about these by reading them again before the interview.

Be professional

Doing an interview or presenting a folio is not much different from a job interview. You need to dress neatly, look and sound enthusiastic, make eye contact, and don't forget to turn off your phone! This is your chance to impress and stand out from the crowd. Be confident, dress accordingly, come prepared and ask questions.

Be passionate

Let your enthusiasm for the subject shine through. Interviewers want to know that you are enthusiastic about the industry. Have opinions and ideas about the field you are applying for. For an art or design course, it's fine to talk about what you do and don't like, but the important thing is to be able to explain why. Go and visit exhibitions, see films, research projects online; whatever it is, be curious about the world, explore what excites you and bring that into the interview.

Get curious

As well as answering questions, this is your chance to ask anything you want about the course. Asking questions shows that you're interested and thinking carefully about your options. This is your chance to figure out if it is the best course for you, not just for interviewers to assess if you are 'good enough' for the course. You might want to ask about the teachers, the timetable, rehearsal expectations, access to facilities, whether your specific needs and goals will be met, and so on. You don't want to sign up to a course only to find out it was not what you expected.

Be selective

When putting together a folio or preparing for an audition, go for quality over quantity. Don't include everything you've ever done. Choose key pieces that demonstrate your creativity and abilities. If you have to include work that is not in your area of strength in order to meet the brief, don't forget that other applicants are in the same boat. Interviewers are looking for potential, not perfection. Remember that every applicant demonstrates a different level of skill across each of the criteria that are being assessed.

Have a back-up

Things don't always go according to plan, so have a back up ready in case of emergency. For example, have a backing track ready in case your accompanist is unable to attend at the last minute. If you leave your sheet music at home, have another piece ready that you know so well that you don't require the score.

Plan your journey

Be sure you know how to find the building and room you need before the day. Leave enough time for traffic and other delays to ensure you get there on time. Try to arrive early so you can relax, look around and maybe chat with other applicants. If there's a problem with the time, contact the institution straight away to arrange a new time. And if you're applying for multiple courses don't forget to check your schedule when booking appointments—you may have one for each course so be careful not to double book!

Don't panic

It's okay to be nervous. Take your time with questions—don't feel pressured to answer immediately if you need to think. If you don't understand a question, or didn't hear it properly, ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase it. If you think it might help, write some key points on prompt cards and bring them with you. And get plenty of sleep the night before so that you feel fresh and ready on the day. Try to walk in with a clear head and focus on getting your points across. But most of all, be yourself.

Take notes for next time

Irrespective of the number of interviews you have, you should retain and reflect upon any critical analysis, or comments made by the interviewers. Whatever the outcome, this won't be the last interview you ever have, so if you get any feedback on your work or your interview skills it can be a good idea to take notes so you can improve in the future. If they don't volunteer any feedback, you can always ask.

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VICTORIAN TERTIARY ADMISSIONS CENTRE

40 Park Street, South Melbourne, VIC 3205

Telephone: +61 3 9926 1020

www.vtac.edu.au

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YouTube: youtube.com/user/vtacmedia